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## Viewing cable 09BOGOTA974, URIBE DEPLOYS TRUSTED LIEUTENANTS FOR REELECTION

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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### Discussing cables

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09BOGOTA974</a>	<a href="#">2009-03-20 22:22</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Bogota</a>

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VZCZCXYZ0000  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #0974/01 0792222  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 202222Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7893  
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8753  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1865  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 7184  
RUEHQP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 3249  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 7910  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFIUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 000974

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: URIBE DEPLOYS TRUSTED LIEUTENANTS FOR REELECTION  
DRIVE

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer  
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) President Uribe has not said he intends to seek a third term in office, but his allies--with his support--are pushing hard for a constitutional change that would give him the option. Uribe has deployed trusted lieutenants to consolidate his control over coalition political parties and block potential rivals. Former Peace Commissioner Restrepo will take over the U Party, former Environment Minister Lozano worked behind the scenes to undercut reelection opponent and Cambio Radical leader German Vargas Lleras, and former Agricultural Minister Andres Arias and Uribe acolyte leads the polls in the Conservative Party. Presidential Communications director Jorge Eastman said that unlike in December, all of the Uribista parties now support reelection. He predicted that the constitutional reform process would be "neither easy nor pretty," but said the latest polls show solid public support for reelection. End Summary.

URIBE WANTS REELECTION OPTION AVAILABLE

2. (C) President Alvaro Uribe has not yet said if he intends to run for a third term, but Presidential Communications director Jorge Eastman told us he wants the option available and has deployed trusted political lieutenants to make the required constitutional reform happen. Long-time Uribe advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria told us he left his position at the palace in March to lead the third term push. He is committed to reelection, because he believes there is no viable alternative to Uribe. Gaviria said Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos has no political judgement or charisma; Cambio Radical leader German Vargas Lleras cannot even control his own party; and former Agriculture Minister Andres Arias lacks intellectual heft. He said the Uribista coalition remains a disparate group of individual political leaders with no commitment beyond their opportunistic support for Uribe. Without the president, the coalition would fall apart.

URIBE RETAKES CONTROL OF COALITION PARTIES

3 (C) In addition to Gaviria, several other Uribe confidants left government in March with the mission of solidifying Uribe's control over the individual coalition parties and blocking moves by potential rivals. Luis Carlos Restrepo left his job as Peace Commissioner, and is set to be elected as president of the U Party in March. Restrepo told us he discussed his strategy with Uribe and intends to use the position to build a new, unified Uribista party (with the exception of the Conservatives) and to push for Uribe's reelection. Restrepo said he would consider running for Congress, and would also focus on increasing Uribe's majorities in the 2010 congressional elections. The goal would be to win 60 of 102 Senate seats and 100 of 166 House seats.

4. (C) Restrepo told us he did not coordinate his plans with Defense Minister and former U Party founder Santos. Though Santos voiced public support for Restrepo's leadership bid, U Party Senator and current Party President Carlos Ferro told us Santos is fuming over the move. Santos had intended to use the U Party for his own candidacy, and Restrepo's success in taking control of the party showed how easily Santos could be "outmaneuvered." U Party Senator and presidential candidate Martha Lucia Ramirez also resigned from the Senate and U Party on March 17. She said she would continue to support Uribe, but could not remain in the party due to its unfair rules for choosing its candidate. Her resignation removes another reelection opponent from the party.

15. (C) Uribe also moved to split the most independent of the coalition parties, Cambio Radical. Environment Minister and Cambio member Juan Lozano resigned on March 11, and then worked behind the scenes during the March 14-16 Cambio Radical Party Congress to advance Uribe's reelection bid. At

the Congress, Cambio reversed its previous opposition to a 2010 Uribe run, dealing a major blow to Vargas Lleras who has consistently tried to block a third Uribe term. Cambio Senator Nancy Gutierrez told us Vargas Lleras was forced to back down, since most party members support Uribe. Eastman said Vargas Lleras' defeat shows that most Uribista legislators--many of whom are only in Congress due to the parapolitical scandal--see no future for themselves without Uribe, leading them to back a second reelection bid. Unlike in December, he added, the Uribista parties now fully support the president.

16. (C) Uribe strengthened his position in the other key coalition party--the Conservatives--by supporting former Agricultural Minister and Uribe acolyte Andres Arias, also known as "Uribito," in his presidential campaign. Arias leads in polling on a Conservative Party primary, but has made clear he will end his campaign immediately if Uribe opts to run again. In the past, Conservative Party leaders had voiced their intention to run their own candidate in the 2010 presidential elections. Former President Andres Pastrana has also discussed the need for the party to assert its independence from Uribe--a shift which the success of Arias' candidacy makes highly unlikely.

#### POLLS SHOW STRONG SUPPORT FOR REELECTION

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17. (U) A recent Gallup poll showed wide support for Uribe's reelection, though several difficult steps remain in the process to change the constitution to allow a third term. Gallup reported that 71% of those polled would either likely or definitely turnout for a reelection referendum, and 80% of that group said they would vote for reelection. Pollster Jorge Londono told us those numbers would be enough to pass a reelection referendum--as well as to meet the required turnout of 25 percent of registered voters (approximately 7.2 million voters)--if the vote were held today. He noted that despite Colombia's economic downturn, voters appear to understand that the slowdown reflect a global crisis, not a local problem, and do not blame Uribe. This could change if Colombia's economic problems continue to deepen.

#### LEGAL STEPS REMAIN TO ALLOW REELECTION

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18. (C) Eastman told us that despite Uribe's strong support in Congress, obtaining passage of the required constitutional reform will be "neither easy nor pretty." The bill to change the constitution to allow reelection will be considered in April in the Senate in the third and fourth of four required votes to pass the measure. Senate President Hernan Andrade told us the Senate will try to modify the bill's existing language to make clear that Uribe can run again in 2010. Most observers think the language passed in the House in 2008 would only allow for a 2014 run. If passed in the final two Senate votes with new language allowing a 2010 bid, the measure would then move to a House-Senate conference committee to be reconciled. Eastman said the multiple votes would offer legislators numerous opportunities to seek presidential favors.

19. (C) Moreover, Eastman noted that House President German Varon (Cambio Radical) opposes a third term for Uribe, and is a close Vargas Lleras ally. He will name the House representatives to the conference committee, and could use his power to kill or delay the reelection bill. Still, this would be difficult given the results of the recent Cambio Radical Congress. Varon said Uribistas have been quietly pushing investigations against him in the hope of finding cause to seek his removal as House president. Supreme

Judicial Council Magistrate Angelino Lizcano told us Uribe allies could also legally delay conference committee action until July when a new House president takes office. Once approved in Congress, the measure would move to the Constitutional Court for approval and then to the referendum.

OPPOSITION STRATEGY: ABSTAIN  
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10 (C) Former President and Liberal Party Chief Cesar Gaviria

agreed Uribe wants a third term, but said his original "F.D.R. 1940 nomination by popular acclaim" strategy had not worked. Still, he said Uribe could still pull off reelection with a hard push. If Uribe succeeded in amending the constitution, he would be the heavy, odds-on favorite to win. As shown by the support of former Liberal Senator Rodrigo Rivera and twenty-two current sitting Liberal Party legislators for Uribe's Democratic Security Policy, the president commands substantial backing even within the opposition Liberals. Liberal Party Senator Juan Cristo and Polo Party President Carlos Gaviria told us the opposition's best hope to block a third Uribe term would be an abstention campaign which prevented Uribe from meeting the required 25% turnout in the referendum.

NICHOLS

=====CABLE ENDS=====